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background notes

Malawi



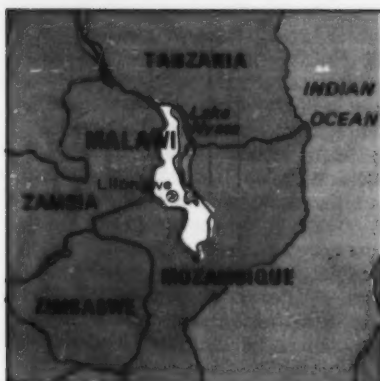
United States Department of State
Bureau of Public Affairs

September 1985

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U. S. GOVT. PUBL.
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Official Name:
Malawi

PROFILE

People

Nationality: *Noun and adjective*—Malawian(s). **Population** (1985 est.): 7.1 million. **Annual growth rate:** 3.2%. **Ethnic groups:** Chewa, Nyanja, Tumbuka, Yao, Lomwe, Sena, Tonga, Ngoni, Asians, Europeans. **Religions:** Protestant 55%, Roman Catholic 20%, Muslim 20%; African traditional religions. **Languages:** Chichewa and English (official). **Education:** *Years compulsory*—none. *Attendance*—45%. *Literacy*—25% (age 15 and older). **Health:** *Infant mortality rate*—170/1,000. *Life expectancy*—47 yrs. **Work force** (387,000 paid): *Agriculture*—51%. *Industry and*

commerce—18%. *Services*—17%. *Government*—21%.

Geography

Area: 118,484 sq. km. (45,747 sq. mi.); about the size of Pennsylvania. **Cities:** *Capital*—Lilongwe (pop. 150,000). *Other cities*—Blantyre (250,000), Mzuzu (30,000). **Terrain:** Plateaus, highlands, valleys. Lake Malawi is about 20% total area. **Climate:** Predominantly subtropical.

Government

Type: Republic. **Independence:** July 6, 1964. **Constitution:** July 6, 1964.

Branches: *Executive*—president (head of government, chief of state). *Legislative*—unicameral National Assembly. *Judicial*—Magisterial and traditional courts.

Administrative subdivisions: 24 administrative districts.

Political party: Malawi Congress Party. **Suffrage:** Adult over 18.

Central government budget (1982-83): \$386.4 million.

Defense: 8% of budget or 1% of GNP (recurrent revenues).

Flag: Horizontal tricolor of black, red, and green with a red rising sun in center of black stripe.

Economy

GDP (1984): \$1.19 billion. **Annual growth rate** (1980-84 avg.): 2.1%. **Per capita GNP** (1984): \$175. **Avg. inflation rate** (1982): 15%.

Natural resources: Limestone, strontianite, monazite, uranium and coal potential.

Agriculture (37% of GDP): *Products*—tobacco, tea, sugar, corn, groundnuts, rice, cotton, beans. *Arable land*—34%, of which 86% is cultivated.

Industry (12% of GDP): *Types*—food processing, tobacco and tea processing, textiles, footwear, consumer products.

Trade (1984): *Exports*—\$302 million: tobacco, tea, sugar, cotton, groundnuts. *Major markets*—Western Europe, South Africa. *Imports*—\$287 million: fuel, fertilizer, agricultural inputs, machinery, spare parts. *Major suppliers*—South Africa, UK, West Germany, Japan.

Official exchange rate (June 1985): 1.75 Malawi Kwacha = US\$1.

Fiscal year: April 1-March 31.

Membership in International Organizations

UN and some of its specialized and related agencies, including the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Organization of African Unity (OAU), Commonwealth of Nations, Lome Convention, African Development Bank (AFDB), Southern Africa Development Coordination Conference (SADCC), Non-Aligned Movement, Preferential Trade Agreement for East and Southern Africa (PTA).

Published by the United States Department of State • Bureau of Public Affairs • Office of Public Communication • Editorial Division • Washington, D.C. • September 1985
Editor: Juanita Adams

Department of State Publication 7790
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at present between tribal groups, and the concept of a Malawian nationality has begun to take hold. A characteristic Malawian culture is still in the formative stages. Predominantly a rural people, Malawians have begun receiving primary school education in sizable numbers only since independence.

GEOGRAPHY

Located in southeastern Africa, Malawi is traversed by part of the Great Rift Valley from north to south. In this deep trough lies Lake Malawi, the third largest lake in Africa, comprising about 20% of Malawi's area. From the south end of the lake flows the Shire River, which joins the Zambezi River 400 kilometers (250 mi.) farther south in Mozambique. East and west of the Rift Valley, the land forms high plateaus, generally between 900 and 1,200 meters (3,000-4,000 ft.) above sea level. In the north, the Nyika Uplands rise as high as 2,600 meters (8,500 ft.); south of the lake lie the Shire Highlands, with an elevation of 600-1,060 meters (2,000-3,500 ft.), rising to Mts. Zomba and Mulanje, 2,130 and 3,048 meters (7,000 and 10,000 ft.). In the extreme south, the elevation is only 60-90 meters (200-300 ft.) above sea level.

Although the new capital, Lilongwe, has rapidly expanded, Blantyre remains Malawi's major commercial center and largest city, having grown from 109,000 inhabitants in 1966 to an estimated 250,000 in 1980. Lilongwe has grown from 19,000 in 1966 to 130,000 in 1980 and has attracted increasing commercial activity as well as the government ministries, all of which were relocated in Lilongwe by 1979. The Parliament still meets in Zomba, the only other major urban area.

Malawi's climate is generally subtropical; it is hot and humid only along the lake, in the Shire Valley, and in the far south from October to April. The rest of the country, especially the higher elevations, is comfortably warm during those months. From June through August, the lake areas and the far south are comfortably warm, but the rest of Malawi can be quite chilly at night, 5°C-14°C (41°F-57°F).

HISTORY

Hominid remains and stone implements have been identified in Malawi dating back more than 1 million years, and early humans inhabited the vicinity of Lake Malawi 50,000-60,000 years ago.

PEOPLE

Malawi derives its name from the Maravi, a Bantu people who came from the southern Congo about 600 years ago. On reaching the area north of Lake Malawi, the Maravi divided. One branch, the ancestors of the present-day Chewas, moved south to the west bank of the lake, and the other, the ancestors of the Nyanjas, moved down the east bank to the southern part of the country.

By A.D. 1500, the two divisions of the tribe had established a kingdom stretching from north of today's Nkhosakota to the Zambezi River in the south and from Lake Malawi in the east to the Luangwa River in Zambia in the west.

The Chewas constitute 90% of the population of the central region; the Nyanja tribe predominates in the south and the Tumbuka in the north. In addition, significant numbers of the Tongas live in the north; Ngonis—an offshoot of the Zulus who came from South Africa in the early 1800s—live in the lower northern and lower central regions; and the Yao, who are mostly Muslim, live along the southeastern border with Mozambique.

Migrations and tribal conflicts precluded the formation of a cohesive Malawian society until the turn of the 20th century. Despite clear tribal differences, no significant friction exists

Human remains at a site dated about 8000 B.C. show physical characteristics similar to peoples living today in the Horn of Africa. At another site, dated 1500 B.C., the remains possess features resembling Negro and Bushman people.

Although the Portuguese reached the area in the 16th century, the first significant Western contact was the arrival of David Livingston along the shore of Lake Malawi in 1859. Subsequently, Scottish churches established missions in Malawi. One of their objectives was to end the slave trade that continued there as late as the end of the 19th century. In 1878, a number of traders, mostly from Glasgow, formed the African Lakes Company to supply goods and services to the missionaries. Other missionaries, traders, hunters, and planters soon followed.

In 1883, a consul of the British Government was accredited to the "Kings and Chiefs of Central Africa," and in 1891, the British established the Nyasaland Protectorate (Nyasaland is the Chichewa word for "lake").

Nyasaland joined with Northern and Southern Rhodesia in 1953 to form the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland. Throughout the 1950s, pressures were exerted within Nyasaland for independence.

In July 1958, Dr. H. Kamuzu Banda returned to the country after a long absence in the United States (where he had obtained his medical degree at Meharry Medical College in 1937), the United Kingdom, and Ghana. He assumed leadership of the Nyasaland African Congress, which later became the Malawi Congress Party (MCP). In 1959, Banda was sent to Gwelo Prison for his political activities but was released in 1960 to join in the constitutional conference in London.

On April 15, 1961, the MCP won an overwhelming victory in elections for a new Legislative Council. The MCP gained an important role in the new Executive Council as well and ruled Nyasaland in all but name a year later. In a second constitutional conference in London in November 1962, the British Government agreed to give Nyasaland self-governing status the following year.

Dr. Banda became Prime Minister on February 1, 1963, although the British still controlled Malawi's financial, security, and judicial systems. A new constitution took effect on May 1963, providing for virtually complete internal self-government. The Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland was dissolved on December 31, 1963, and Malawi became fully independent under its

Travel Notes

Customs: Travelers must have a valid passport or travel document, as well as visas for any countries they will pass through en route to or from Malawi; however, a visa is not required to enter Malawi. Immunizations for yellow fever or cholera are required of travelers passing through infected areas. Health requirements change; check latest information. The Malawian Government practices strict censorship, and travelers' luggage is subject to inspection.

Currency: Exportation of Malawi currency is limited; exporting other currency is limited to amounts declared on a customs form upon arrival.

Climate and clothing: Wear summer clothing from September to April, woolen from May to August. The Malawi Government bans slacks or shorts for women (except for sports); dresses must cover the kneecap. Men's hair may not extend below the nape of the neck.

Health: Medical facilities are few. Malaria is endemic. Tapwater in major cities is potable; in rural areas, water must be boiled. Raw fruits and vegetables should be peeled. Freshwater lakes and streams may contain bilharzia (schistosomiasis) organisms. Seek local advice before swimming in Lake Malawi, although its established beach resorts are believed safe.

Telecommunications: Good long-distance radio/telephone service is available. Telegraph services connect Malawi with the US. Malawi is seven time zones ahead of eastern standard time.

Transportation: Lilongwe's Kamuzu International Airport has regular service from the US via London, Paris, Amsterdam,

Nairobi, or Johannesburg. Direct rail service between Malawi and the Mozambican ports of Beira and Nacala was almost totally cut off by guerrilla activities as of June 1985. Nearly all Malawi's freight traffic is currently trucked to either Lusaka, Zambia, or Harare, Zimbabwe, at which point it is generally transshipped by rail to Indian Ocean seaports. Most goods utilize the port of Durban, South Africa. Within Malawi, major internal arteries between cities and the road between Lilongwe and Lusaka, Zambia are paved. Traffic moves on the left. Rental cars are usually available in the major urban centers, as are taxis.

Tourist attractions: Three major game parks: Lengwe (for antelope), in southern Malawi, 1½ hrs. from Blantyre by road; Kasungu, in central Malawi, 2 hrs. north of Lilongwe (for elephant, hippopotamus, buck, zebra, and occasional lion and leopard); and Nyika, in the north, one of the world's highest game areas (2,100-2,400 m.). Lake Malawi offers lovely beaches, a few lodges, and many varieties of tropical fish. Snorkeling is popular. The Dedza, Mulanje, and Zomba Mountains are popular for climbing and hiking.

National holidays: Business establishments and the US Embassy are closed on the following Malawian national holidays:

New Year's Day	January 1
Martyrs' Day	March 3
Good Friday	
Easter Monday	
Kamuzu Day	May 14
Republic Day	July 6
Mother's Day	October 17
National Tree Planting Day	December 21
Christmas Day	December 25
Boxing Day	December 26

new name as a member of the Commonwealth of Nations (formerly the British Commonwealth) on July 6, 1964. Two years later, Malawi adopted a new constitution and became a republic with Dr. Banda as its first president.

GOVERNMENT AND POLITICAL CONDITIONS

The Government of Malawi is a greatly modified version of the British system. Under the 1966 constitution, the president is selected every 5 years by Malawi Congress Party officials and tribal chiefs. However, Dr. Banda was proclaimed president for life in 1970 by a unanimous resolution of the MCP convention. Malawi has no vice president. The members of the presidentially appointed Cabinet are either drawn from or become members

of Parliament. Malawi's unicameral National Assembly (usually referred to as Parliament) currently numbers 112 seats, the majority being elected members, with 15 presidentially appointed members.

Malawi has two judicial systems: the magisterial courts, headed by a three-member Supreme Court, and "traditional courts," created in 1964 and based largely on the local court system maintained by the British before independence. Unlike officials of the earlier local courts, however, a majority of the members of the traditional courts are chiefs, and they have jurisdiction to hear any type of criminal case. Although each system employs an appeals process, no appeals are allowed between courts in the traditional system and courts in the magisterial line.

Local government is carried out in 24 districts within 3 regions administered respectively by district commissioners and regional ministers with Cabinet rank. All are appointed by the central government.

Malawi has only one authorized political party, the MCP. The National Assembly elections were last held in June 1983 on the basis of universal suffrage by secret ballot.

Principal Government Officials

Life President; Minister of External Affairs, Defense, Works and Supplies, Justice, and Agriculture—
Dr. H. Kamuzu Banda

Ministers

Minister at Large—Hon. Sydney Somanje
Minister Without Portfolio and Administrative Secretary of the MCP—Robson W. Chirwa
Labor—E.C. Katola Phiri
Education and Culture—Louis Chimango
Forestry and Natural Resources, Finance—Edward I. Bwanali
Trade, Industry, and Tourism—S. Chimwemwe Hara
Transport and Communications—Wadson B. Deleza
Local Government—B.L.R. Kapichira Banda
Health—Dalton Katapola
Youth—Poulton Mtenje
Community Services—Samford Demba
Governor of the Reserve Bank—L. Chakakala Chaziya
Ambassador to the United States and the United Nations—Timothy Mangwazu

Malawi maintains an embassy in the United States at Bristol House, 1400 - 20th Street NW., Washington, D.C. 20036 (tel. 202-296-5530).

ECONOMY

The Malawi economy continues to demonstrate surprising resilience in the face of a number of daunting obstacles to growth. In an environment characterized by depressed world commodity prices, severe transportation bottlenecks, and onerous debt service obligations, Malawi registered real economic growth of 6.8% in 1984. However, economic performance in the 1980s has trailed substantially the sustained growth of the prior decade.

Malawi has relied on an expanding agricultural export sector as its primary vehicle for economic growth. A

landlocked country endowed with few exploitable mineral resources, Malawi has developed since independence into a major exporter of tobacco, tea, sugar, groundnuts, cotton, and most recently, maize. Malawi has typically been self-sufficient in its staple food maize, and over the past 3 years, has exported substantial quantities of maize to its drought-stricken neighbors in the region. The country's small industrial sector is built primarily around processing of agricultural commodities.

The agricultural sector can be divided between traditional smallholder farming and commercial estates. The smallholder subsector produces maize, groundnuts, cotton, rice, and fire-cured tobacco. Producer prices have been raised substantially in recent years, motivating Malawian smallholders to market record crops of cotton, maize, and tobacco in 1984 and again in 1985. Estates dominate the production of sugar, tea, flue-cured tobacco, burley tobacco, coffee, and macadamia nuts.

Relatively weak commodity prices have coupled with stiff debt servicing obligations and the economic burden caused by the loss of direct rail service to Mozambican ports to create balance-of-payments problems for Malawi over the past 5 years. Since 1981, Malawi has been pursuing a structural adjustment program with the assistance of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. Over the past 4 years, the government has implemented significant reforms in the areas of exchange control policy, parastatal reorganization, agricultural producer prices, and industrial price decontrol. While the country was obliged to reschedule its external debt over the 1982-84 period, repayments on revised schedules have now resumed. The outlook for the medium-term future is favorable, though declining terms of trade and transportation bottlenecks have set back efforts to restore the robust growth rates of the 1970s.

FOREIGN RELATIONS

Under President Banda, Malawi's foreign policy orientation has been pro-Western. It maintains diplomatic relations with principal Western countries but has little contact with communist nations. It is a member of the United Nations and several of its specialized and related agencies, the Organization of African Unity, and the Commonwealth of Nations. It is also a signatory to the Lome Convention, which deals with tariff preferences in the European Community.

Malawi has had diplomatic relations with South Africa since the late 1960s and views itself as a bridge between that government and the rest of Africa. Although Malawi's political ideology is different from that of its three contiguous neighbors, it has pursued normal relations with them and all other states of the region. They have established joint commissions with Zambia and Mozambique to resolve mutual problems and have recently exchanged diplomatic representatives with Mozambique, Zimbabwe, and Tanzania.

U.S.-MALAWIAN RELATIONS

The United States enjoys cordial relations with Malawi, and significant numbers of Malawians study in the United States. An American cultural center in Lilongwe is frequented by many Malawians seeking to expand their knowledge of the United States by using the lending library, attending lectures by visiting American speakers, or viewing films or video tapes. The United States has an active Peace Corps program and an Agency for International Development (AID) Mission.

U.S. and Malawian views on the necessity of economic and political stability in southern Africa generally coincide. Through a pragmatic assessment of its own national interests and foreign policy objectives, Malawi advocates peaceful solution of the region's problems through negotiation, and works with the United States to achieve these objectives in such important arenas as the United Nations.

The two countries maintain a continuing dialogue through diplomatic representatives and in periodic visits by senior officials. President Banda has visited the United States several times, most recently in April 1978.

Principal U.S. Officials

Ambassador—Weston Adams
Deputy Chief of Mission—Genta H. Holmes
Defense Attache—Maj. William Schweinfurth
Public Affairs Officer (USIA)—Jane Marte

The U.S. Embassy in Malawi is located in the new capital city development area in Lilongwe. The address is American Embassy, P.O. Box 30016, Capital City, Lilongwe 3, Malawi (tel. 730166). ■